



Campaign Finance Reform

The state of Connecticut currently has some of the toughest election laws in the nation, but the recent controversy surrounding former Governor Rowland has put a greater focus on campaign contributions. The Rowland scandal centered on contributions from lobbyists and other interest groups. That is why I have been a strong supporter of placing greater campaign spending limits on those who have the greatest financial influence and those who have abused the system in the past, namely, Political Action Committees (PACs) and lobbyists. This year I joined my fellow Republican colleagues in the Senate in offering a compromise that would have instituted a publicly financed campaign system in return for bans on contributions from PACs and lobbyists. While I do not favor taxpayer-financed campaigns, this olive branch was extended as a means of compromise to fix a system that is heavily influenced by special interests. The majority party nixed this idea and to date the issue remains unresolved.



How to Reach Me:
Mail

Senator Thomas J. Herlihy
Room 3400, Legislative Office Building
Hartford, CT 06106 - 1591

Telephone

1-800-842-1421

TTY 860-240-0163
(text telephone for the hearing impaired)

E-Mail

Thomas.Herlihy@cga.ct.gov

State Senator

Thomas J. Herlihy

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State Senator

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State Senator **Thomas J. Herlihy**

Dear Neighbor,

On July 29th, one of the most horrific motor vehicle accidents in Connecticut's history occurred at the intersection of

Routes 10 and 44 in Avon. The crash, involving an out-of-control dump truck, tragically claimed the lives of four people and injured dozens. In response to this devastating incident, Gov. Rell called upon the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) to conduct thorough investigations into trucking companies with the highest number of vehicle and driver violations over the past three years.

Along with Senator Jonathan Harris of West Hartford, I called for the creation of an Avon Mountain Accident Task Force. A Task Force was created by the Department of Transportation (DOT) and charged with making recommendations to improve motor vehicle safety along Route 44. It is important to bring local officials who have knowledge of the roadway together with experts to determine what safety improvements are necessary to prevent a tragedy like this from ever happening again.

Of course, there were many other issues that came before the legislature this year. Please take a moment to read about some of the important measures that were addressed in 2005. You can also visit my state senate website at www.senaterepublicans.ct.gov for updates on events taking place at the Capitol.

If you have any specific questions regarding these issues or any issue concerning state government, please feel free to call my office at 1-800-842-1421, email me at Thomas.Herlihy@cga.ct.gov or write to me at: Senator Thomas Herlihy, Legislative Office Building, Room 3400, Hartford, CT 06106.

Sincerely,

State Senator
8th District

Avon Mountain Traffic Safety

In response to our request, the DOT established a Task Force comprised of officials from the Federal Highway Administration, Capitol Region Council of Governments (CRCOG) and the DOT to examine the existing roadway and recommend improvements to Route 44 over Avon Mountain. Members of the Task Force have also met with the Massachusetts Department of Transportation to review existing truck escape ramps and truck recovery systems in Massachusetts.

In November, after meeting with municipal safety officials, the DOT began the construction of six speed enforcement areas on Avon Mountain. New truck laws have already been adopted, including a measure I co-sponsored during the October Special Session that increases the penalties for owners of trucking companies who knowingly operate vehicles that do not have insurance. The bill, which unanimously passed the Senate, makes the operation of such vehicles a Class D felony, which is punishable by up to five years in prison and fines up to \$5,000.



Senator Herlihy with David and Angie Tolly, the owners of Avon Old Farms Inn, and Senator Harris

Eminent Domain

One of the most controversial Supreme Court decisions ever to be handed down occurred this year when the nation's High Court determined that eminent domain could be used for purposes of private economic development. The ruling, while directly related to the City of New London's endeavor to redevelop waterfront property through private interests, could have a monumental impact on all privately owned property and the ability of local governments to take property through eminent domain.

It is important to note that the Court's ruling specifically reserves the power to enact stricter rules regarding eminent domain to the states. Thus, Connecticut can put an end to this threat by simply enacting legislation. Republicans in the Senate offered legislation this year that would have prohibited a municipality from taking residential property through eminent domain if that property, as a result of the project, were to be privately owned or controlled. Unfortunately, this measure was defeated mainly along party lines because more time was needed to "study the issue."

Home Heating Assistance

During the recent Special Session the General Assembly passed legislation that increases the benefits for both the Connecticut Energy Assistance Program (CEAP) and the Contingency Heating Assistance Program (CHAP). In addition, from November 25, 2005 to April 1, 2006, the following products are exempt from the state's 6% sales tax: programmable thermostats; water heater blankets; window film; window and door weather strips; caulking; water heaters, gas furnaces and windows that meet federal Energy Star standards; and oil furnaces that are at least 85% efficient. With a long, cold winter predicted, this legislation is aimed at helping residents to manage the high cost of home heating. For more information, contact the Department of Social Services winter heating assistance line at 1-800-842-1132, or www.dss.state.ct.us.

Insurance Coverage for Prosthetic Devices

A bill I crafted that would require all health insurers to cover up to \$7,500 of the cost of prosthetic devices unanimously passed the Senate this year. While the legislation was never taken up in the House of Representatives for a vote, I will continue next year to change the current law that requires insurance companies to provide only up to \$300 in coverage. Oftentimes, a prosthetic arm or leg is part of the recovery process for someone who has been through a severe trauma. This legislation would provide a better quality of life for people with this medical condition and allow them to go on with their lives knowing that they have medical coverage for prosthetic devices. Having artificial limbs that allow an individual to resume the most normal and productive life possible is a basic right of all individuals.

Budget

There were some disappointments this year as well, none bigger than the new state budget. The \$31.2 billion biennial state budget creates \$1.2 billion in new spending, including the irresponsible use of one-time revenues that will create a greater burden on future budgets. This year alone spending will increase a whopping 8.8%!

At a time when towns across Connecticut are fighting tooth and nail to scratch out minimal local budget increases, the state's 8.8% increase is simply wrong. When you consider that since the income tax and spending cap were enacted in 1991 budget increases have averaged 5%, this is indeed very troubling in that it practically ignores the constitutional spending cap that voters overwhelmingly adopted in 1992.

What's more, the budget also increases taxes by approximately \$355 million, including a 6% gross receipts tax on nursing homes and a 20% corporate tax surcharge in 2006 and 15% surcharge in 2007. Additionally, the budget creates a new gift and estate tax, retroactive to January 1, 2005.

As I said on the floor of the Senate, we need to remember where we came from when drafting the state budget. In my travels across the 11 towns that make up the Eighth Senatorial District, it is very clear that people want a budget that is fair and reasonable. This budget is anything but fair and reasonable to the residents of Connecticut and one that I could not support.

Environment

Our region of Connecticut is home to a vast amount of open space land. Upon taking office last year, Gov. Rell made open space preservation a priority of her administration. This year the legislature passed legislation that allows the commissioner of the Department of Environmental Protection to enter into joint ownership agreements with nonprofit organizations to acquire the development rights to qualified agricultural land if the nonprofit's mission is the permanent protection of agricultural land for continued agricultural use.

